

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 30, 1999**

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference, on Tuesday, November 30, 1999 at 1 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. *The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss the Section 2.0 Interim Guidance Document and minimum analyte list.*

INTRODUCTION

The status of the Action Items from the meeting on November 16, 1999 is as follows:

- Mr. Chuck Wibby has been contacted about inclusion of additional analytes into the PT field of testing (FOT) tables.
- Mr. Matt Caruso and the PT Subcommittee are working on the PT FOT tables. Once complete, Mr. Caruso will send the tables by e-mail to the committee. Copies will be made available at the Accrediting Authority meeting and PT Committee session at the Fifth NELAC Interim Meeting (Vi). Acceptance criteria will not be included in the handouts.
- The Section 2.0 Interim Guidance Document was not submitted for inclusion in the participant packet at NELAC Vi because further discussion was needed. This will be a topic for today's meeting.
- Ms. Burmeister sent an e-mail to Mr. Wibby with Mr. David Friedman's concerns about the list of standardized method codes for the PT fields of testing. This is discussed further below.
- The draft frequently asked questions (FAQs) were added to the current document and sent to committee members and to Ms. Jeanne Mourrain, Director of NELAC, for review and approval. Comments were received from Ms. Mourrain and the committee will be revising the FAQs as necessary.
- A FAQ has been drafted on the confusion between the NELAC PT program and the externalized U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) PT program.
- Mr. John Helm has been contacted with questions and concerns about Environmental Toxicology PT.
- Ms. Lara Autry of the USEPA responded to concerns about Appendix H (acceptance criteria and removal of interdependent analytes) and said that they are in the process of revising the appendix and she will bring copies of the appendix to NELAC Vi.
- A definition for "PT Study" has been drafted and sent to committee members.
- A request was sent to Ms. Ramona Saar of American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA) for equivalency documentation. Ms. Saar faxed documentation to Ms. Burmeister in response and this information will be forwarded to Mr. Caruso for his review.

AGENDA ITEMS

Interim Guidance Document

Ms. Mourrain attended the meeting to participate in discussions regarding the Interim Guidance Document for Section 2.0. With respect to the second paragraph of Section 2.0, she said that the PT Committee cannot make the determination regarding equivalence to an American National Standards Institute/Registrar Accreditation Board (ANSI/RAB)-accredited registrar for an organization to become a Proficiency Testing Oversight Body/Proficiency Testing Provider Accreditor (PTOB/PTPA). NELAC is a standard setting body only. Neither the conference, nor its committees can make these kinds of approvals/designations. She said that there are references in the Constitution and Bylaws and in Chapter 1 which reinforce this statement. Section 2.2.2 will also need to be revised because it contains similar language about the designation of an organization as a PTOB/PTPA upon approval by the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP).

Ms. Burmeister said that she has received documentation from Ms. Saar showing A2LA's equivalence to an ANSI/RAB-accredited registrar. However, the question remains as to who can determine whether an organization is equivalent to an ANSI/RAB-accredited registrar. Three options were identified: 1) the Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB), 2) the Accrediting Authority (AA) group, and 3) creation of a new advisory committee. This question will probably not be resolved by NELAC Vi, but needs to be resolved before the Sixth NELAC Annual Meeting (VI). Ms. Mourrain will discuss this issue with the AA group during their meeting next week. She will also discuss the possibility of setting up a new advisory committee with USEPA management. Ms. Caroline Madding will also discuss the issue with the AARB. Ms. Burmeister will revise the Interim Guidance Document to remove any words about approvals.

Minimum Analyte List/Acceptance Criteria

The committee asked Ms. Mourrain whether the PT Committee has the authority to set a minimum analyte list and the regression equations. She replied that the committee can do this because it is an extension of the NELAC Standards and that the AAs have not yet reached agreement on a minimum analyte list. Further, the AAs were hoping that the PT Committee would help with this. The committee responded that they have no problem taking the lead with developing the minimum analyte list. They have been working on PT fields of testing summary tables which contains the minimum analyte list for PTs (along with acceptance criteria for the providers and not for general distribution). The committee will plan to have the list ready by NELAC Vi.

A committee member questioned what happens if there are no acceptance criteria for some analytes. Mr. Caruso said that the list will not be as complete as most AAs would like, but the committee has not received enough data. The acceptance limits and pass/fail criteria are established on a program/matrix/analyte basis. Appendix C outlines the priority for using acceptance criteria: 1) USEPA National Standards, 2) regression equations developed by the NELAC PT Committee, and 3) statistical limits based on a minimum data set.

Acceptance criteria for the solid waste analytes are more difficult because some limits are based on the sample data at the time the analyses are run. The limits will change from lot to lot, batch to batch, and require a minimum of 20 interdependent analyses. As long as the laboratory meets the provider's statistical limits, then it will pass the PT.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Subsequent to discussions about the Interim Guidance Document, Ms. Burmeister will revise the new draft FAQ #6 to remove any references to A2LA. Ms. Marykay Steinman will take the lead in addressing other comments received from Ms. Mourrain about the FAQs. Once complete, the FAQs must be approved by the Board of Directors before distribution. Therefore, they will probably not be ready before NELAC VI.

Method Codes

Mr. Wibby and Ms. Michele Kropilak have been working on developing unique, standardized method codes for the PT analytes. At the present time, they are generating the 15-character alpha-numeric method codes. Once they are complete, Ms. Kropilak for review them and will then disseminate the codes to the committee.

Mr. Bob Graves said that the USEPA database will store method codes for water samples even though they go beyond the requirements of the Water Supply /Water Pollution (WS/WP) studies. However, he stressed that the database only covers water samples (not solid waste or air). The question was raised as to who will monitor the data for solid waste. Another committee member suggested getting the database committee involved and perhaps finding a way to combine all the analytes into one database. Mr. Caruso pointed out that there is a cost involved with developing a database. Mr. Graves suggested that the committee try to get other branches of USEPA to provide the same involvement as the Office of Water. Ms. Burmeister will bring this gap in database oversight (outside of water) to the attention of the Board of Directors.

Definition of "PT Study"

A definition for "PT Study" has been drafted and e-mailed it to the committee. Concern was expressed that this definition does not agree (with respect to purpose) with the definition of "proficiency testing" in Section 2.1, third paragraph. Ms. RaeAnn Haynes will consider the possible disconnect and revise the definition if necessary.

USEPA Update

An update on activities in the Office of Water (OW) was provided by Mr. Graves. The USEPA is working on the Whole Effluent Toxicity (WET) standard and would like to get it privatized as soon as possible. He also told committee members that OW would like to be apprized of any problems that come up in the implementation phase of NELAP. He said that this information is very helpful to them in developing standards.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Ms. Burmeister discussed the schedule for future meetings with committee members and they agreed to continue the biweekly schedule. Ms. Burmeister will schedule meetings by teleconference for the following dates: January 11, January 25, February 8, and February 22, 2000.

ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 30, 1999

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Ms. Barb Burmeister will revise the Section 2.0 Interim Guidance Document and send it to the committee for review.	
2.	There is an issue of who can approve an accrediting authority when it meets the conditions of Section 2.0, paragraph 2. Ms. Jeanne Mourrain will discuss this issue with the Accrediting Authorities during their meeting next week.	
3.	Ms. Carol Madding will discuss this issue (see Item 2) at the next AARB meeting.	
4.	Ms. Marykay Steinman will take the lead in revising the FAQs to address Ms. Mourrain's comments.	
5.	Mr. Matt Caruso will continue to develop the PT field of testing tables. One set will contain acceptance criteria (for PT providers) and the other will not (for general distribution).	
6.	Ms. Burmeister will set up the conference call schedule for January and February, 1999.	
7.	Mr. Chuck Wibby will generate method codes and send them to Ms. Michelle Kropilak to review. Ms. Kropilak will then distribute the codes to the committee.	
8.	The committee has determined that there is a gap in database oversight (outside of water). Ms. Burmeister will bring this to the Board of Directors' attention.	
9.	Ms. RaeAnn Haynes will consider a possible disconnect between the new definition of "PT study" and the third paragraph of Section 2.1 (definition of PT).	
10.	Committee members will bring copies of the draft Appendices G and H for handout at NELAC Vi.	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 30, 1999

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